



News Release

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New Campaign Aims to Unplug Kids from Screens

Youth urged to find active alternatives to TV and computer time

(SALT LAKE CITY) – Consider this: By the time they graduate from high school, Utah children will have spent more time sitting in front of televisions, computer screens and video games than in the classroom. That’s why the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is launching Unplug ’n Play, a week-long campaign taking place April 23-29, designed to get kids unplugged from screens and plugged into active alternatives.

Too much sedentary time in front of computer and TV screens has been linked to a variety of health problems, including obesity. A 2006 UDOH study showed that 22.5 percent (nearly one in four) of elementary school children were at an unhealthy weight. And these kids face more than just image issues. They are at a higher risk for “adult” diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. And overweight kids are likely to grow into overweight adults.

“The purpose of Unplug ’n Play week is to make kids and parents aware that limits on screen time should be set,” said Lynda Blades, Project Coordinator, UDOH. “They need to know there are more active and creative things to do—like getting off the couch and playing,” she added. Utah’s kids are getting more than three hours of screen time daily with TV alone.

Blades hopes the campaign will urge families to start paying attention to the time they spend in front of a screen and pledge to explore other activities during the week of April 23-29, or even to get started earlier. “Like the campaign says, we want them to ‘Unplug ’n Play,’” she said.

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During the campaign, kids and their families will challenge one another by signing pledge cards promising to reduce their screen time, and tracking their active alternatives. Often, kids actually prefer other activities besides those utilizing a screen—they just need a little inspiration. Elementary, middle, and junior high schools throughout the state are invited to participate in Unplug 'n Play and may compete for prizes. Schools with the best participation will win cash awards.

Parents are invited to Unplug 'n Play too. “Parents really need to participate alongside their children,” said Blades. “Because much of the screen time takes place at home, parents can do a lot to promote healthy habits.”

The campaign kicks off this Saturday, April 14, from 11:00am-1:00pm at the Olympic Oval (5662 South 4800 West, Kearns). Attendees can pick up pledge cards, tracking sheets, a list of suggested alternative activities, as well as a special wristband and Unplug 'n Play Post-it® notes to attach to their screens as reminders. The Utah Department of Health’s campaign partners – Check Your Health, Intermountain Health Care, and KUTV – will sponsor booths, healthy snacks, a one-mile mini-marathon, and sports activities. Citadel radio stations will offer prizes and broadcast live from the event.

For those who can’t make it to the kick-off event, materials (in both English and Spanish) are also available at www.checkyourhealth.org and by phone through the Check Your Health hotline (1-888-222-2542).

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.